

A <sup>K</sup>Sharp  
**SERMON**

About the  
*Government of the Thoughts,*  
Preach'd before the  
**KING and QUEEN,**  
A T  
**WHITE-HALL,**  
The 4th of *March*, being the 2d  
*Sunday* in **LENT**, 1694.

By the Most Reverend Father in God,  
**JOHN** Lord Arch-Bishop of York.

Published by Their Majesties Espe-  
cial Command.

The Fourth Edition.

**L O N D O N,**

Printed for *Walter Kettilby*, at the Bishop's  
Head in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*,  
1698.

# SERMON

Government of the Young  
Preached before the  
KING and QUEEN

AT  
WHITEHALL  
The 10th of March, being the 23  
Year of the said Year 1694



By the Most Excellent  
John, Bishop of Bath

Printed by J. Streater, Stationer  
in the Strand

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# A S E R M O N

About the  
*Government of the Thoughts,*

Preach'd before the  
*King and Queen.*

PROV. iv. 23.

*Keep thy Heart with all diligence, for out  
of it are the issues of Life.*

**T**HE Argument with which this Au-  
dience was entertained the last Lord's  
Day, being the *Government of the  
Tongue*; I cannot think it improper or un-  
reasonable for me, who have the Honour to  
come next, to treat about the *Government of*

*the Thoughts* : There being a near relation between these two, and a necessary dependence of the one upon the other.

Our *Words* indeed are more easily governed than our *Thoughts*, because they are more in our Power. But it will be impossible either to govern our *Words* or our *Actions*, as we should, unless we first bring our *Thoughts* in some measure under Government.

I must confess this Argument of the *Government of the Thoughts*, though it be a very useful, yet it seems also a very nice and difficult one, through the great variety of Cases, arising from Mens different Tempers, which will not come under the same Rules, and yet ought to be provided for. But however, this shall not discourage me from undertaking this Argument ; it shall only make me more careful as to what I say about it. That is, to have respect, as much as I can, to all sorts of Tempers, and to deliver what I have to say with so much Plainness, that every body may go along with me.

The *Words*, upon which I ground my Discourse, are those of Solomon, which I have read unto you, and which contain one of those Precepts that he lays down for the Religious Conduct of our Lives. Keep (saith he) thy Heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of Life.

Not to trouble you with what others have said upon this Text, I take the true Meaning of it to be this,

By



By the [*Heart*] here, which we are exhorted to keep, we are to understand the *Inward Thoughts* and *Motions*, and *Affections* of our Souls or Spirits; all which in the inspired Writings are constantly said to be seated in the *Heart*. This undoubtedly is the Scripture-Notion of the *Heart*.

And when we are here bid to keep our *Hearts with all diligence*, I think there is no question to be made, the Meaning is, That we should diligently attend to the *Thoughts* and *Motions*, and *Affections* of our Minds; that we should watch them narrowly, lest at any time we should give our Consent to something we ought not. This is the Meaning of keeping our *Hearts with all diligence*.

And then a Reason is added, why it concerns us thus to keep them. And that is this. Because out of the heart are the issues of life. What is the Meaning of that Phrase? Plainly this. The Issues, the Fruits, the Effects that are shewn in our Lives and Conversation, do certainly proceed from the Heart, and therefore, accordingly as that is well or ill guarded or kept, so will our Lives and Conversations be. The Goodness or Badness of our Lives doth altogether depend upon the attending or not attending to the *Thoughts*, and *Motions*, and *Inclinations* of our Minds. As our Caution and Watchfulness in this Point is greater or less, so will our Course of Life be better or worse. And therefore it concerns

us all, that mean to live well, to be infinitely careful in this Matter.

This is a plain Account of the Advice that is here given us. So that you see, if I mean to discourse pertinently to my Text, my Argument must be (what I said) the Care, and Management, and *Government* of our *Thoughts*, as they fall under a Religious Consideration.

In treating of this Argument there seem to me *Two Things* needful to be done.

*First*, To give an Account what Power a Man hath over his own *Thoughts*.

*Secondly*, To shew wherein the Art of *Governing* of them doth consist.

It is indeed this *second* thing which my Text naturally leads me to speak to: But I cannot speak to that to any purpose, till I have made way for it by clearing the *first*. It is in vain to give Rules about the *Government* of our *Thoughts*, till we know how far we have Power over them; how far they fall, or do not fall, under our Conduct and Management.

And I must needs say, that most of those I have met with, that have discours'd about the *Government* of *Thoughts*, by not enquiring into, and settling this Point, have been so far from benefiting all their Hearers, that desired to receive benefit by their good advices, that to several of them they have done harm:

harm : Because as to them their advices have been perfectly unpracticable. Now those that by their own Experience found them to be so, instead of considering that that Teacher might be in a mistake, or that He did not sufficiently weigh and examine the Case of all Persons he gave his advice to, have peremptorily concluded that they themselves were in the fault, and therefore they were in an evil condition, because they found themselves not able to live up to what was advised them.

The *first* Question then is, How far a Man hath power over his own Thoughts. There is not indeed any single Answer to be given to this Question, that will fit all Men. For that is impossible. It would be as unreasonable to demand it, as it would be to require of a Workman to make a Garment, that should fit all sorts and sizes of Men.

Some Men by the very Principles of their Make and Constitution, are much better able to govern their Thoughts than others. Some that are naturally weaker, have by long use and many tryals obtained a greater power over their Thoughts than others. Again, the same Persons that at some times have a greater power over the motions of their Minds, may at other times have a less Command over them; and this according as their Health, or their Business, or a hundred Contingencies of outward things do affect them. So that all that can be done, as to this matter, is to lay  
down

down some general Propositions, which every Body is to apply to himself as there is Occasion. And Five of this kind I have to offer, and which, I think, will take in all, or the greatest part of what belongs to this Argument.

The *first* Proposition I lay down is this, That the first Motions of our Minds are very little, if at all, in our power.

By the *first Motions of our Minds*, I mean those sudden Thoughts, or Apprehensions, or Passions, or Desires, which are excited in our Minds by any Object that is at that time presented to our Imagination. As to these, I say, we are not so much Masters of our selves as to be able to stop them; nay, though perhaps they be very irregular. And the Reason is, because they are produced so quick, that there is not time enough given for Reason to interpose.

There is no necessity indeed that a Man should give Consent to these Motions; but as for their coming into his Mind, he can no more help it, than he can help his present Temper, or the present Circumstances he is engaged in.

Thus for Instance. Do you think it possible for a Man that is of a Fiery Passionate Temper, to avoid the feeling a sudden Resentment of Anger arising in his Mind, if he meets with any unexpected Affront, or other great Provocation? Or for a Man that desires



to be well thought of, not to entertain some Vanity of Imagination, when he hears himself commended or flatter'd? Or for a Man that is addicted to Pleasures, not to feel some irregular Inclinations in himself towards the gratifying his Appetites in those things, when he hath all the Temptations before him? And thus in all other Cases.

I grant indeed that a Man by long Consideration, and a serious exercising himself in the ways of Vertue and Piety, may bring himself to that Temper, that he shall not have so many irregular undecent Motions in his own Mind, upon any occasion whatsoever, as he was wont to have; and that those that were formerly Temptations to him, will at last be none: But still I say, the first Motions and Workings of his Mind however they be occasioned, are in a great measure out of his power; he cannot stop them; and therefore the Art of governing his Thoughts doth not lye there.

The second Proposition I lay down is this, When a Man's Mind is vigorously affected and possessed, either with the outward Objects of sense, or with inward Passions of any kind, in that Case he hath little or no Command of his Thoughts. His Mind at that time will be in a manner wholly taken up with that it is then full of: Nor will he be able, till those Impressions be worn off, to think freely of what he pleaseth.

Thus

Thus for Instance, VVhen a Man is under a sharp, tormenting Pain ; as he cannot avoid the *feeling* of that Pain ; so neither can he avoid the *thinking* of it. VVhen one is full of Grief for the loss of a dear Relation ; or transported with Passion for some unworthy usage he hath met with : It is in vain to say, Pray think not of these Matters ; for these things must and will in a great measure imploy his Thoughts, till his Passions do cool, and the Impressions that caused them be vanished.

Thus for a Man to come from some Business in which he is more than ordinarily concerned ; or from the hearing some very good or very bad News ; I say, to come fresh from this to the laying his Prayers : I do not, I cannot wonder, that in this case his Mind will be much upon his *Business*, or his *News*, notwithstanding all his Endeavours to the contrary.

For the Nature of Man is such, that he cannot so of a sudden turn his mind from one *Business* to another ; but that if he did closely and vigorously apply himself to the first *Business* ; his Thoughts will for some time run upon it, even after he hath applied his Mind to the other.

I do not deny, but that a Man may often so order his Affairs, as to be able to keep his Mind clear and free from such Prepossessions as I am now speaking of, so as that when he comes to apply himself to any *Business* he hath

hath a mind to, he may intend it with his whole Might. But this I say, If our Minds be once engaged with warm Thoughts about any thing; it is very hard, if not impossible, to get them disengaged on a sudden. So that the *Art of Governing our Thoughts* doth not much lie in that neither.

*Thirdly*, There are some Cases likewise, where a Man's Thoughts are in a manner forced upon him, from the present Temper and Indisposition of his Body. So that though he be in no Passion, though there be no unusual Objects of Sense that excite those Thoughts in him; nay, though he never so much resolve not to think upon those things; yet so long as that Habit of Body lasts, he cannot avoid those kind of Thoughts: So that in this Case also, there is little room left for the *Government of Thoughts*.

That which I now say, happens frequently, not only in all sorts of Distempers where the Brain is visibly disturbed, as in Feavers, and the like; which often cause a thousand delirious Fancies, and sometimes down-right Madness and Distraction: But also in other Cases where there seems to be no Fever, or other visible Distemper; nor doth the Brain, as to other matters, seem to be at all disorder'd; but the persons, in all appearance, are sound both in Body and Mind.

And this is the Case of some deeply *Hypochondriac* Persons; many of which will be haunted

haunted with a *Sett* of *Thoughts* and *Fancies*; that they can by no means get rid of, though they desire it never so earnestly.

Sometimes they cannot get it out of their Heads, but that they are *Atheists* and *Infidels*; they neither believe in God nor in Jesus Christ, nor have any sense at all of Religion.

Sometimes they are tormented with *Blasphemous* Thoughts, and they cannot set themselves to the Performance of any Office of Devotion, but a thousand impious Fancies will come in and spoil all.

Sometimes they fancy they are guilty of several grievous Crimes, which it is to be hoped, it was hardly possible they should be guilty of; nay, you cannot convince them but that they do every day commit some of these Crimes, because they imagine they give consent to them.

And whilst these sorts of Thoughts fill their Imaginations, there is not a Passage in the Bible that they read, nor a Sermon that they hear, but they find something in it, which they do so perversely apply to their own Case, as thereby to increase their trouble, but not to get any relief.

I have known several well-disposed Persons, and some of them sincerely Pious, that have been in this Condition.

What now is to be said to this? Why, it is very certain that all these Thoughts and Fancies are thrust upon them, and are not the

free,



free, natural, voluntary Operations of their own Minds ; but the effects of Vapours or Hypochondriac Melancholly. Nor can the Persons themselves any more help their thus Thinking, or Fancying, than they can help the Disturbances of their Dreams when they have a mind to sleep quietly. Indeed we may properly enough call these *Fancies* of theirs, their *waking Dreams* ; as their *Dreams* are their *sleeping Fancies*.

Well but now of all Persons whatsoever, these People are most desirous to have *Rules* given them for the Government of the Thoughts. And I cannot blame them, because their Thoughts are certainly very Troublesome. But truly if we would speak pertinently to their Case, instead of giving them Advices for the regulating their Thoughts, they should rather be advised to look after their *Bodies*, and by the help of good Prescriptions to get rid of those *Fumes* and *Vapours* which occasion these Fancies. When the Cause is removed, the Effect will soon cease. I do not in the least doubt, whatever these People may think of their own Case, but that this is as properly a *Bodily Disease*, as a *Fever*, or Fits of the *Falling Sickness*.

In the mean time, while they are in this Condition, whatever Rules are proper to be given to other Persons for the Government of the Thoughts, of all People living those Rules do the least concern them. For those Thoughts  
which

which they complain of, do not at all fall under Regulation or Government; because they are suggested to their Minds whether they will or no. And for my part, I think it a great deal more advisable (if it could be) to neglect and despise them; than to be perpetually struggling and disputing with them, and vexing themselves about them.

But, you will say, if Men be such Slaves to their *Thoughts*, and are thus necessarily passive under them, where is the Freedom of *Thoughts*? To this I answer,

In the *fourth* place, out of these three Cases I before mentioned, we have *Liberty of Thinking*, and may chuse our own *Thoughts*. And that Liberty and Freedom we have in *Thinking*, doth, to my apprehension, mainly consist in this, *viz.* That all of us (who are not in the Circumstances I have been hitherto speaking of) can, if we please, apply our Minds more vigorously to one sort of thing than to another; and accordingly as we do thus apply our Minds, so will the most of our *Thoughts* be.

It is in our power among the multitude of Objects which present themselves to our Mind, (as for Instance, *God, Vertue, Holiness, Heaven, Wealth, Power, Greatness, Preferments, Fine Clothes, Splendid Equipage, Sensual Pleasures, Recreations, Diversions, Knowledge, Learning, Arts*, and the like: I say, that among all this multitude of Objects that present

sent themselves to our Minds) it is in our power to determine our selves, which of them we will dwell upon, and make a *Business* of. And accordingly, when at any time we have pitched upon any of them, as a *Business*, it is in our power to mind that *Business*, either more or less diligently. And if it be such a one, as that we mean in good earnest to concern our selves about it, it will then so fill our Minds, as that by attending to that, we shall either prevent in a great measure other Thoughts from coming into our Heads; or if they do come in, they will not long stay there, but will very speedily give place to that which is our main *Business* at that time.

And the Reason of this is plain; Because our Natures are of that Make, that two things at once cannot well possess our Minds; and therefore if we be intent about one thing, we cannot have much room or leisure for Thoughts of another Nature.

But then *Fifthly* and lastly, Though this that I have said be the true Nature of that power we have over our Thoughts, as to the directing them to a particular Object: Yet there is another power we have over them that ought here more especially to be considered; because in it are laid the very Foundations of *Virtue* and *Vice*, and upon account of it, all our Thoughts become either morally good or evil.

That which I mean is this. Though we cannot in many Cases, think always of what we would ; nay, though we cannot hinder abundance of Thoughts from coming into our Minds against our will : Yet it is always in our power to assent to our Thoughts, or to deny our Consent to them. And here it is that the *Morality* of our *Thoughts* begins. According as we *Assent* or *Dissent* to the *Motions* that are made in our Minds ; so will our *Thoughts* have the *Notion* of *Virtuous* or *Sinful* Thoughts.

VWhen any *Temptations* are presented to us from without, we cannot perhaps (as I said before) avoid the feeling an irregular *Passion*, or *Motion*, or *Inclination* stirring within us upon occasion thereof : But yet at that very time it is in our power, whether we will comply with those *Passions* and *Inclinations*, or not ; whether we will consent to them, or not ; whether we will pursue them further or not. Now if we do not consent to them, but endeavour to stop, and stifle, and resist them as soon as we are aware of them ; there is yet no harm done. Our *Thoughts*, how undecent or irregular soever they were, are rather to be accounted the *Infirmities* of our *Corrupt* Nature, than our *Sins* properly so called.

And thus it is likewise as to our *Wandering Thoughts* in our *Prayers*. If we strive against them, and endeavour to keep our Minds in a  
Devout



Devout Composed Temper, and attend as well as we can to the Duty we are about : I say, if we do this, I hope those *Distractions* and *Wanderings* will never rise up in Judgment against us.

And as for the frightful *Blasphemous* Fancies, which, as I told you, some, even Pious Persons are tormented with : As to them, I say, they, of all other irregular *Thoughts*, have the least danger of Sin in them, though they be not so solemnly and formally disputed with, and contested against. Because indeed they are so terrible in their own Nature; that no Man in his Wits, and that hath any sense of God or Goodness, can be suppoed to consent to them. They are indeed great *Infelicities*, but by no means any *Sin*, any farther than we approve of them ; and to approve of them for any tolerably good Man is impossible.

But then on the other side, If we consent to any wicked Motion or Inclination that we feel in our selves ; let it come in how it will, never so suddenly, never so unexpectedly ; if we close with any *Thought* that prompts us to Evil ; so as to be pleased with it, to delight in it, to think of pursuing it, till it be brought into Action : In that case we are no longer to plead our *Original Corruption* ; for in that very instant we become *Actual Sinners*, *Actual Transgressors* of the Law of God, the Obligation of which reaches to our very Hearts

and Thoughts as well as our Actions. Tho' yet we are not so great Transgressors, so long as our Sin is only in Thought, or Desire, or Purpose; as if it had proceeded to outward Action.

All this is taught us for true Divinity, by no less an Author than St. James, in the first Chapter of his Epistle, v. 13, 14, 15. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God tempteth no man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth Death.*

Which passage of the Apostle doth plainly contain these three Propositions.

*First*, That no Man is drawn to commit Sin by any State or Condition that God hath put him into; no, nor by any Temptation, either outward or inward, that is presented to him. It is not a Sin to be tempted; no, nor to feel that we are tempted by some disorderly Inclination that arises in our Minds thereupon.

But, *second*, then our Sin begins, when we yield to the Temptation, when we are drawn away by our own Lusts, and enticed, when they get the Victory over us, and we do consent to them. Then *Lust hath conceived, and bringeth forth Sin.*

But, *Thirdly*, Though the very consent of our Wills to a Temptation, be a Sin in us; yet

yet that Sin is not so great as it will be afterwards, if it be brought to Action. Sin in the desire or purpose, is but an *Embryo*; it is but the first Rudiments of Sin; but when it comes to be acted, it is then a Sin in its full dimensions; and the Consequents of it may be Fatal without Repentance. *Sin when it is finished bringeth forth Death.*

Having thus given some Account, how far our *Hearts* or *Thoughts* do fall under Government; I now come to my *Second Point*, that is, to treat of the *Art of Governing them*, or to lay down the necessary *Rules* and *Directions*, which are to be observed in order thereunto.

And we shall not need to go far for these *Rules*, for they will all naturally flow from the Principles I have already laid down. And I think, they may conveniently enough be reduced likewise to these *Five* following.

*First*, From what hath been said, it appears, that the *First* and great Point to be done by us, if we would keep our *Hearts* in a good Frame, and order our *Thoughts* to good purposes, is, that we rightly pitch our main Designs; that we chuse that for the great business of our Lives, that really ought to be so.

Now what that is, can bear no dispute with any Man that will fairly use his Reason. For certainly, that which is our greatest Concernment in the World, ought to be our greatest Business and Design in the World.

And it is evident to every one, that believes he hath a Soul to save, that his greatest Concernment of all, is, to approve himself to that God who made him, and disposes of all his affairs; and who accordingly as we sincerely endeavour, or not endeavour to serve him, will make us either very Happy, or very Miserable, both in this Life and the other. So that there can, as I said, be no Dispute about what ought to be the great Business and Design of our whole Lives, and to which all other Businesses must yield.

Now if we be so wise, as really to propose this as our main End, and resolve to mind it, and follow it as such; I say, if we be so wise as to do this; we have made a very great step towards the obtaining a security to our selves, that the greatest part of our Thoughts, and Desires, and Affections, will be such as they should be; such as will be acceptable to God, and satisfactory to our selves.

For as I told you before, whatever is our main Business, be it what it will, it will, in a great measure, draw all our Thoughts to it. Our Natures are so contrived, that we must always be thinking of some thing or other. But then they are so contrived likewise, that we think most of that, which is most in our Eye, most in our Esteem, most in our Pursuit. And this is that which our Saviour tells us; *Where your treasure is, there will*



will your heart be also. Whatever it be that you place your Happiness in, upon that will your Thoughts run ; upon that will your Desires, your Inclinations, your Affections, be fixed.

We have a VWorld of Instances of the truth of this every day before our Eyes. If a Man hath set his heart on *Money*, and propo-  
 seth it to himself, as the *Business* of his Life, to be Rich : VVhy, I dare say, such a one will own to you, that most of his Thoughts are upon that Project ; and that he finds it so far from being difficult to keep his Mind close and steady to his *Main Interest*, as he calls it ; that it is rather difficult to him to think of any other Matters.

If a Man be given up to *Pleasure*, and thinks nothing worthy his living for, but VVine and VVomen, and good Eating and good Company ; Is it not natural to such an one to bend all his Thoughts that way ? Or doth he put any force or violence upon himself, in thinking and contriving all the day long, how to bring to pass the Gratification of his Lusts or his Appetites.

VVhy, my *Brethren*, if we did all of us in good earnest make the Service of God, and the purchasing Heaven and Happiness to our selves, as much our Business, our End, our Design, as these Men make VVealth or Pleasure to be theirs, we should certainly be thus affected. The common Course of our Thoughts,

would naturally and easily, without the least constraint, run upon those Objects : And we should take as great delight in Thinking of our Treasure, and Contriving for the obtaining of it ; as they do in Thinking and Projecting for theirs.

I say, Thus it would be with us. For I cannot for my Life apprehend, what Charms there can be in Worldly or Sensual Things, to attract a Man's Mind ; what Fetters there can be in them, to bind his Thoughts, and tye them to themselves : But that there are the same, or greater, in Vertue and Goodness ; in the Love and Favour of God ; in a Pure Conscience here, and Eternal Glory hereafter : Always provided, that they are as much made the Objects of our Choice and Pursuit, as the other.

And therefore I cannot but suspect, where we see Men so very cold and backward to Spiritual Things ; and so apt to spend all their Thoughts upon trifling, vain, or worldly Matters, that it is with a great deal of Pains and Reluctancy, that they can bring themselves to think of their Everlasting Concernments : I say, I cannot but suspect that these Persons have not yet laid up their Treasure in Heaven, as our Saviour expresseth it ; they have not yet so wholly devoted themselves to the Service of God, as to make it their Main Business. When once they have done that, I dare assure them, they will find it so far from

from being a force upon them, to think of good things, that it will be very natural to them; and they will find the greatest Pleasure in the World in so doing.

*Secondly*, Whoever would keep his Heart always in a good Frame, and be able to give a good Account of his Thoughts to God, must have an especial care to avoid two things, viz. *Idleness* and *loose Company*. For both of these do strangely unhinge a Man's Mind; and disarm it of that Severity, which is its best guard and defence against Evil Thoughts; and make it become an easie prey to every Temptation that will attracque it.

A wise Man should never be at such a pass; as to say, *I have nothing to do, I do not know how to spend my next Hour*: But should so order the Course of his Life, that all the Portions of his Time, as much as is possible, may be filled with some useful, or at least some innocent Imployment.

It is *Idleness*, and having nothing to do, that is, the Mother of most of those vain, and unprofitable, and sinful Fancies, in which some Men spend their days. And whereas Temptations do now and then come in the way of other Men; the *Idle* Man is forced to seek out Temptations for the shipwreck of his Vertue. And therefore no wonder, if he that seeks them, finds abundance of them.

And truly *Loose* and *Impertinent Conversation*, which was the other thing I named, though

though it looks something with a better Grace, yet is not much better than Idleness. For where-ever it is much used, it will so emasculate a Man's Mind, and take off the edge and vigour of it, as to serious things, that he cannot easily get it into a good Frame again. *Evil Communication* (saith St. Paul) *doth corrupt good Manners*. And therefore those people, a great part of whose Life is taken up in gadding up and down ; in Play ; in merry Meetings ; in telling or hearing idle Stories, and the like : It is impossible but their Thoughts and Inclinations, and the whole Frame of their Hearts will be suitable ; that is to say, very frothy ; very light and foolish ; not to say, profane, and wicked, and Atheistical too, if the Company they much converse with, be of that strain.

*Thirdly*, Another thing of great moment, for the *keeping our Hearts*, is, to be as attentive as is possible to the *first Motions* of our Minds ; and whenever we find that they tend toward something that is forbidden, to stop them as soon as we can.

We cannot, as I told you before, often prevent irregular Desires, or Passions, or Inclinations, from arising in our Minds, upon fundry occasions. But this we can do : As soon as we are aware of them, we can refuse our Consent to them ; (and in that case I hope they will not be imputed to us as Sins ;) Nay, not only so, but we can refuse their  
breaking



breaking out, or shewing themselves in our Words, or our Actions. For the Motions of our outward Members are all at our Command, though the first Motions of our Minds be not.

Here therefore will lye a main Point in the Art of well governing our Minds and Thoughts. You cannot perhaps, for instance, prevent a sudden Passion of *Anger* from rising in your Minds upon twenty Accidents; But as soon as you feel this Passion, you can thus far stifle it; you can seal up your Mouth, so that the Passion shall not vent it self in unseemly Words; And if you will withdraw that Fuel from the new-kindled Fire, it will soon be extinguished, and die. Whereas if you suffer it to break out in bitter Speeches and Expressions, it will flame beyond measure.

Thus again, If any undecent, impure Fancies or Desires should be excited in you upon any occasion: It was not perhaps in your power to keep them from coming into your Minds: But it is in your power to withdraw from the Temptation that caused them; and to endeavour to direct your Thoughts to some other Object; at least not to proceed one step in any outward Action towards the accomplishing of those Desires. If you take this Course, the Disturbance of your Mind will soon cease, and you will return presently to your ordinary Temper.

And

And let me tell you this further; That by your being thus careful to resist and smother the first beginnings of Sin; you will not only preserve, in a great measure, the Innocency of your Minds under the present Temptation; but you will also have this farther advantage, that by this means, you increase your Power over your Thoughts, against the next time that the Temptation returns. Every check you give to the first motions of Sin, makes the next assault of them the less furious. And if you do constantly use your selves, thus to Guard and Watch over your Hearts; you will in time obtain such a Command over them, that you will not be troubled with a quarter of those irregular desires, and passions, which heretofore upon several Occasions used to be kindled in you. By this Method you will strengthen your Faculties, and enlarge your Powers; and by degrees bring your selves to that happy Temper of Soul, that there will be no great War between the Law of your Members, and the Law of your Minds: But the World and the Flesh will be Crucified to you, as you are to them; that I may use St. Paul's Expressions.

But then *Fourthly*, That you may be able not only to keep *bad* Thoughts out of your Minds; but also to have a constant spring of good ones; there are some particular Exercises very proper for this purpose to be recommended. Such I mean as these, *Converse with*

with discreet and pious Persons; Reading good Books, especially the Holy Scriptures; taking times of Meditation and Recollection; and above all, Fervent and Constant Prayer to God.

It is not to be told how every one of these things doth help to inspire us with good Thoughts and Purposes.

A little passage now and then, though but occasionally dropt in a Conversation, that is to the business of *Virtue* and *Goodness*, will supply us some times with matter for good Thoughts for a considerable while after. What lasting Impressions then, do you think, would be left upon our Minds, if we made it our constant Exercise every day, to read or hear something out of the Bible, or some other good Book, with a design to grow Better thereby?

But above all things, we must take care to be diligent and serious in our Applications to the Throne of Grace: It is Hearty Prayer and Devotion, that when all is done, will prove the most Effectual Means, for the keeping our Hearts steady to that which is Good, and securing them from the pollutions of the sensible Earthly Objects that do surround us.

O therefore let us be constant in our Religious Offices. Nay, let us take every opportunity that our Affairs will allow us, of raising our Minds to God, and thanking him for his Infinite Love and Goodness to us; and imploring the continual Influences of his Grace  
and

and Holy Spirit, and re-inforcing our Vows and Purposes of persevering in his Service.

By this means we shall come to lead Spiritual Lives indeed. Our Souls will be a perpetual Fountain of Good Thoughts. And while we live here, our Conversation will be in Heaven. For God and Christ, and the things above will have our *Hearts*, though the World hath our *Bodies*.

But then, in the *Fifth* and last place, Notwithstanding what I have hitherto said, concerning the *Diligence* with which we are to keep our *Hearts*; yet this is always to be remembered, That with our *Diligence* we must be careful to join *Discretion*.

My Meaning is this, We must have a care not to *intend* our Thoughts immoderately, and more than our Tempers will bear, even to the best things: But we must so keep our *Hearts*, as at the same time to preserve our *Healths*, and keep up the Vigour of our Minds.

And the way to do that, is, Not to put them too much, or too long, upon the stretch at any one time: But to relax them when there is occasion, and to let them run out, and entertain themselves upon any thing that comes next to hand, so long as it is Innocent.

It is a vain thing to imagine, that we can always be thinking of our great Business; or that we can always be a Praying, or Reading, or Meditating; or, that, as our Condi-  
tion



tion is in this World, even the greater part of our *Thoughts* should be such as we call *Devout* and *Religious Thoughts*.

God hath provided a great deal of other Business for us to apply our Minds to, so long as we live in this World. And by minding that diligently and conscientiously, we do serve God as acceptably, as if we were Reading or Praying.

Nay even then, when we have no urgent Business upon our hands to take up our Minds, it is not necessary that we should be always thinking of Religion. Nor would I call every Thought, a *vain*, or an *idle*, or a *sinful* Thought, that hath not God, or our Spiritual Concernments for its Object. Even the most Spiritually-minded among us, must oftentimes be content to be entertained with such *Thoughts* as our Company, or our Temper, or the present Circumstances we are in, do suggest to us. And provided those *Thoughts* be innocent, and do not intrench upon the Laws of *Piety*, and *Purity*, and *Charity*; be they otherwise very trifling and impertinent: I say, I would not look upon them as *ill Thoughts*, nor have any one angry at himself upon account of them.

The truth of it is, So long as we consist of Bodies and Souls, we cannot always be thinking of serious things. They indeed are the Wisest that think of them most, but it is even dangerous to attempt to think of them always.

For,

For, as most Mens Constitutions are, that is the ready way to spoil the Habit of our Bodies, and by that means to render our Minds perfectly unfit for *Thinking* at all to any good Purposes.

Thus have I laid before you the Main Things wherein, as I do believe, the right *Governing our Thoughts* doth consist. And I doubt not, they are so safe, and so effectual, that whosoever will sincerely practise them, as far as he can, will so keep his *Heart*, that the *Issues* from thence in his *Life and Conversion* will be Happy and Prosperous. I conclude all with the *Collect* of this Day.

*Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of our selves to help our selves; Keep us both outwardly in our Bodies, and inwardly in our Souls; that we may be defended from all Adversities which may happen to the Body, and from all EVIL THOUGHTS which may assault and hurt the Soul, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*



F I N I S

A *Suppl*  
S E R M O N

Preached before the Honourable  
House of Commons,  
At St. Margarets Westminster.

On *Munday*, Jan. 30, 170<sup>3</sup>.

B E I N G

The Anniversary of the Martyrdom  
of King CHARLES I.

By RICHARD WEST, D. D. Prebendary  
of Winchester.

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